

Dream in Progress: The Cleveland Dream Neighborhood

Proposed revitalization of two near-West Side neighborhoods through housing rehabilitation and refugee resettlement

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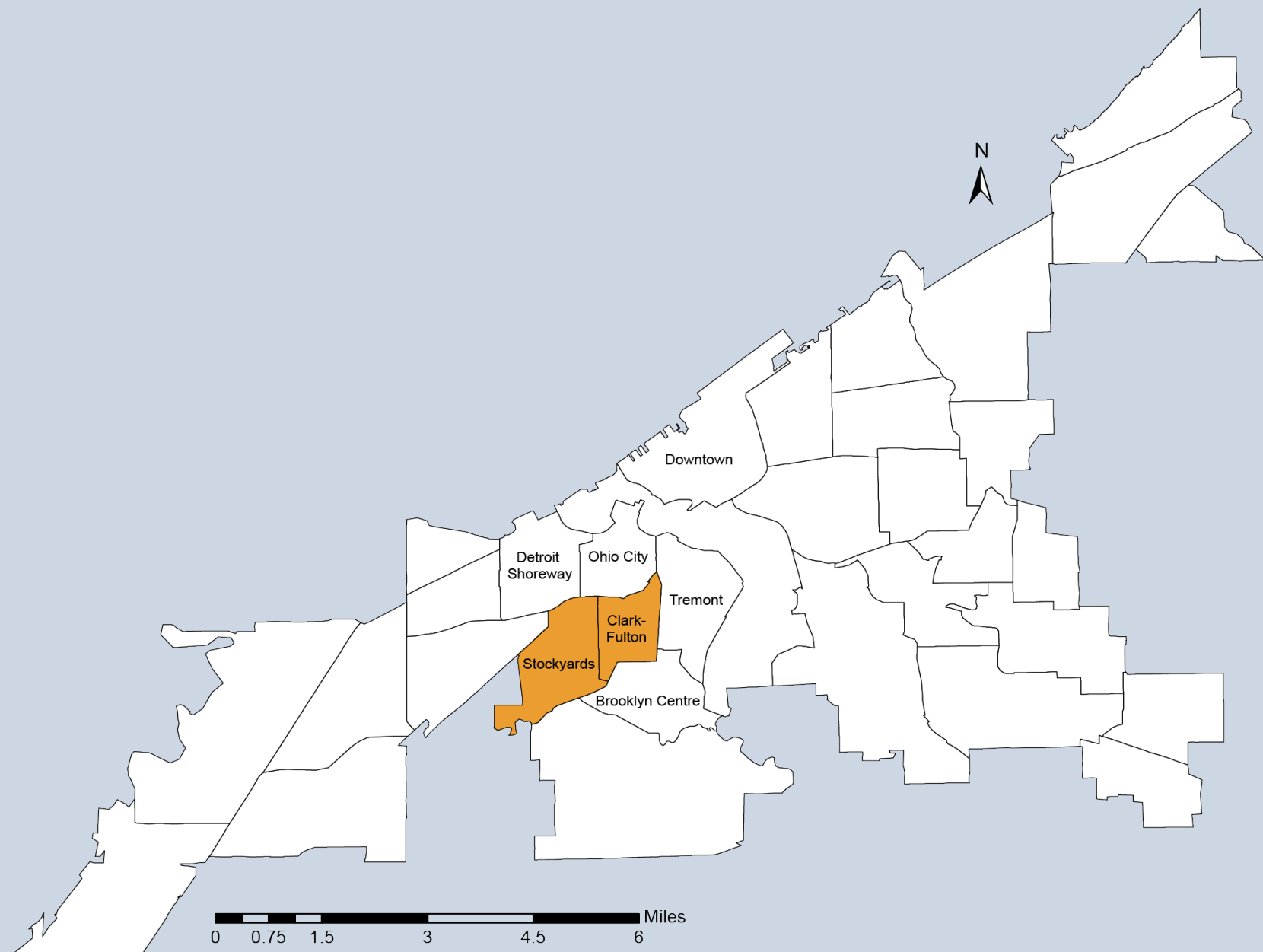


Figure 1: Selected neighborhoods within the City of Cleveland.
Source: City of Cleveland Planning Commission

1 Refugee Resettlement: A Unique Response to Rust Belt Decline

- In Cleveland, decades of white flight, suburbanization, and a manufacturing exodus caused **some of the worst vacancy and property value decreases in the country**
- Through the resettlement of refugees in vacant but rehabilitated structures, local **stakeholders hope to revitalize the Stockyards and Clark-Fulton neighborhoods** on Cleveland's West Side
- They believe **new refugee tenants will improve low property values** and lift the neighborhood out of a vicious cycle of blight—run-down and dilapidated houses not fit for occupancy—that too often leads to poverty, crime, and further disinvestment
- Dream Neighborhood **organizers also believe they can help refugees** who come to the US fleeing political, religious, or cultural persecution; violence; warfare; disaster or famine
- In Cleveland, refugees significantly contribute to the economy—a **10:1 return on resettlement agency investments**, or a **\$48 million total economic impact**—and they make extremely reliable tenants



Figure 3: Thomas Jefferson International Newcomers Academy, constructed in 2010, is a public pre-K through twelfth-grade English immersion school that has served as an anchor for the nearby immigrant and refugee communities. Its services, staff, and students comprise the heart of the Dream Neighborhood.

2 Existing Neighborhood Resources

Community leaders organized and promoted the Dream Neighborhood project in Stockyards and Clark-Fulton because of pre-existing resources:

- The International Newcomers Academy** educates immigrants and refugees from 45 different countries who speak 25 different native languages
 - Enrollment increased from 118 students in 2010 to 919 so far in 2017
 - Each teacher has TESOL certification; teachers and classroom aids are multilingual
 - Students can bus to the school from anywhere in Cleveland
 - Welcoming center offers workshops and language classes to adults
- The International Village Block Club**
 - Community gardens for all residents in the area
 - Welcome wagons for new arrivals
- Large foreign-born population** in the neighborhoods
- Nearby businesses**, employers, and potential job centers
- Affordable housing** made possible through the rehabilitation of older stock



Figure 4: One of the community gardens built by the International Village Block Club with help from Cleveland's Summer Sprout Program.

3 Local Refugee Resettlement Agency Role

Cleveland's three resettlement agencies—**Catholic Charities** - Migration and Refugee Services, **US Committee for Refugees and Immigrants**, and **US Together**—provide a broad level of services to refugee households:

- Pre-arrival processing and reception planning
- Housing or apartment set up (making sure to rent and furnish the unit)
- Airport pick up and a hot meal on the night of arrival
- Case management
- Development and implementation of a resettlement plan
- Documentation
- Orientation
- Employment and skills assessment
- Acculturation
- Referrals and other social service linkage
- Information and referrals to community resources like the Newcomers Academy
- Advocacy
- Coordination of community volunteers
- Classes and workshops
- Follow up and basic needs support

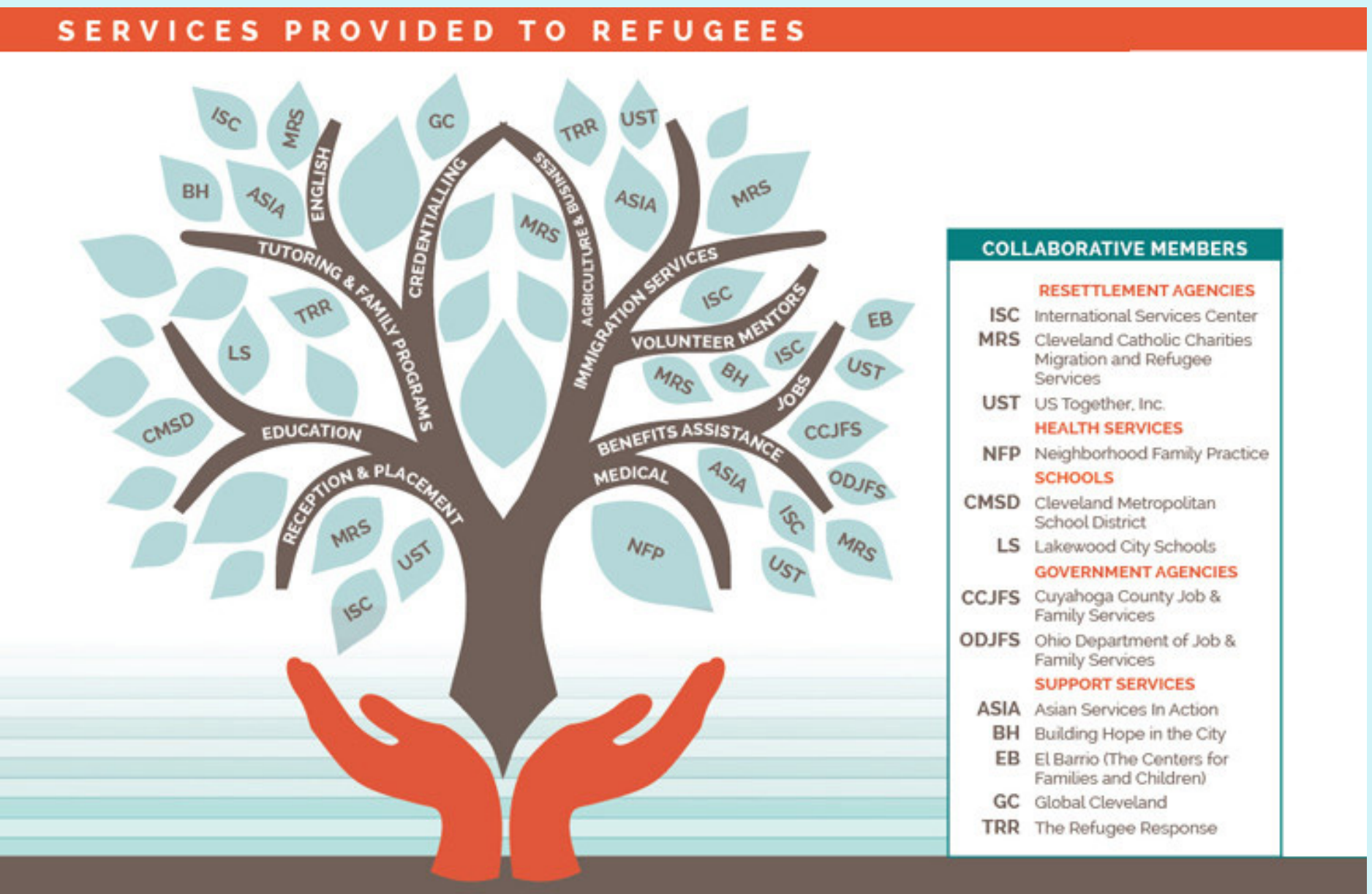
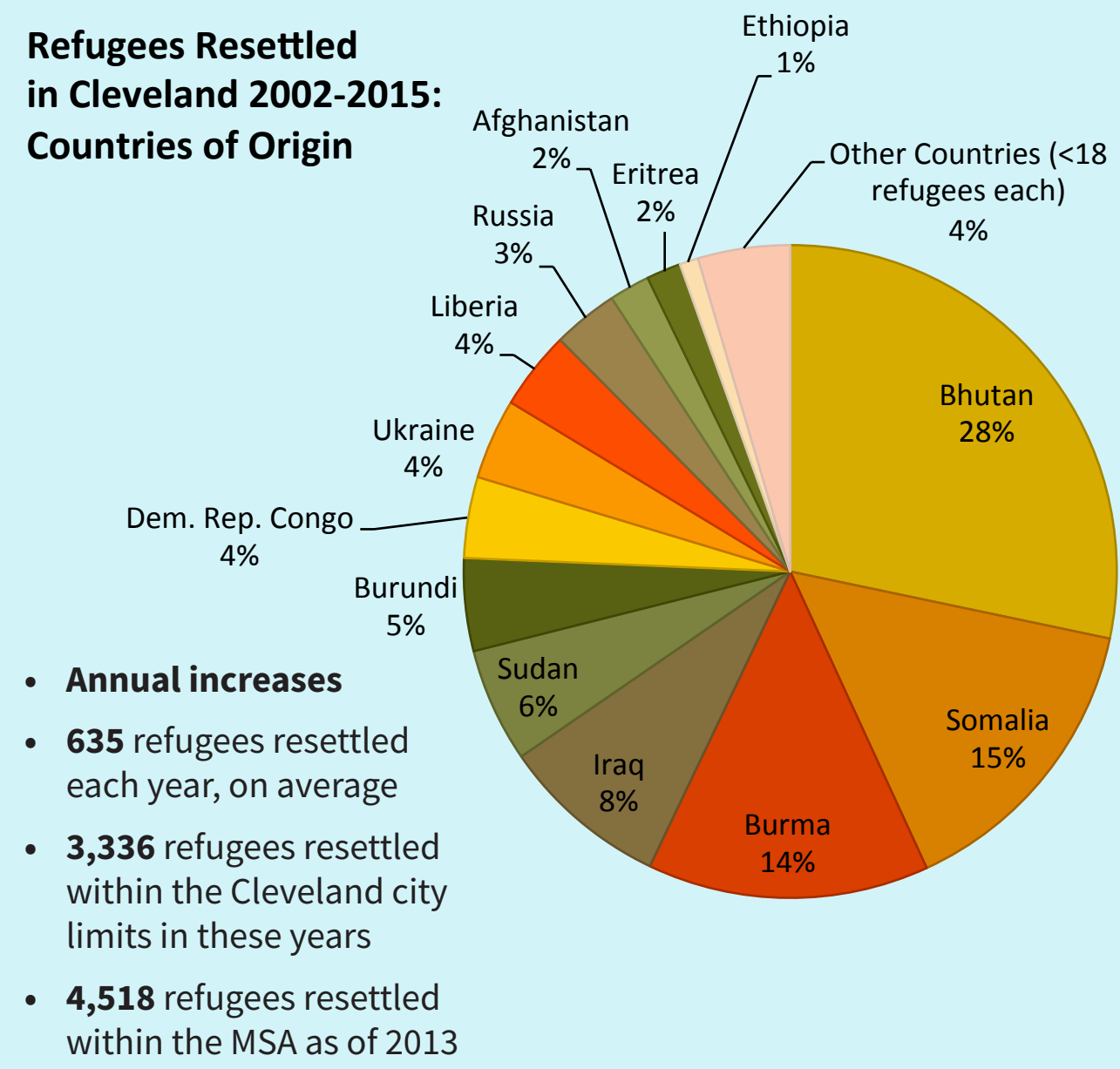


Figure 6: The Refugee Services Collaborative, formed in 2011, shares information amongst its members in an effort to improve service delivery to resettled refugees in Cleveland.
Source: The Refugee Services Collaborative



- Annual increases**
- 635** refugees resettled each year, on average
- 3,336** refugees resettled within the Cleveland city limits in these years
- 4,518** refugees resettled within the MSA as of 2013

4 Housing and Rehabilitation Process

To benefit refugees, all stakeholders must work together: the Cuyahoga County Land Reutilization Corporation (Land Bank), the Metro West CDO, small scale contractors, employers, and resettlement agencies. The process involves multiple steps:

- Financial institutions transfer low-value, real-estate owned (REO) properties in the project area to the Land Bank at low or no cost; the Land Bank acquires these tax delinquent and foreclosed properties by state law
- Through the Deed-in-Escrow Program, the Land Bank gives houses to Metro West or sells them to other contractors and developers; they repair homes within a certain amount of time for an agreed upon budget—the Land Bank retains the deed until completion
- The Land Bank then transfers title to the contractors—now owners—who rent or sell the house
- Metro West CDO obtains property from the Land Bank—sometimes in partnership with other nonprofits and resettlement agencies. With resettlement agency staff, they find trustworthy contractors to rehab and serve as landlords for new refugees
- New families settle into new homes: they must achieve economic sustainability within three months. Limited government funding subsidizes job searches. Most find jobs within the first five months. Refugee households continue to receive services from local resettlement agencies

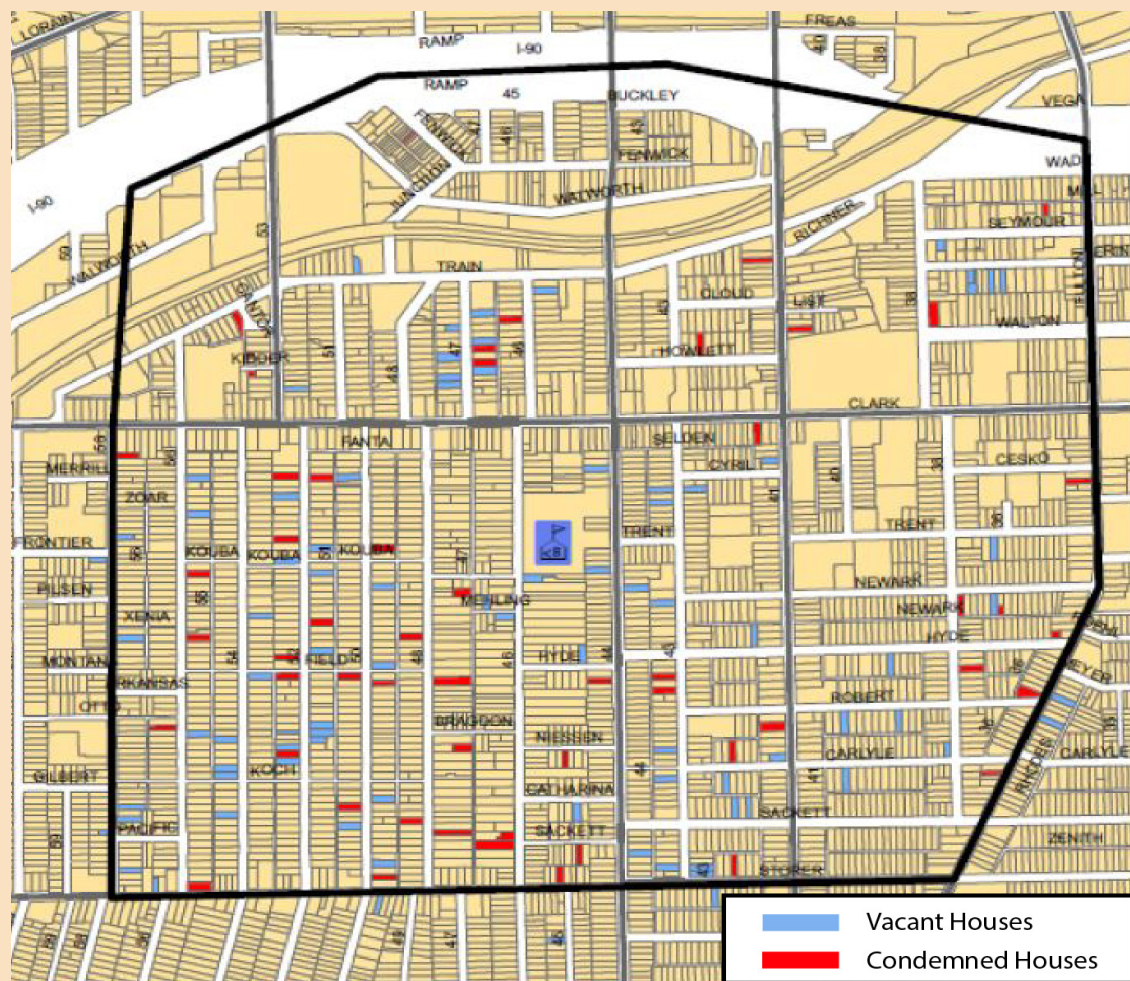


Figure 5: The neighborhood has approximately 162 vacant and condemned structures within the Dream Neighborhood surrounding the Newcomers Academy (center, dark blue).
Source: The Office of Councilman Brian Cummins and Metro West CDO

5 Challenges and Future Outlook

With dedicated people striving to make the Dream Neighborhood a reality, these pieces come together for success. However, in 2016, the year of the Dream Neighborhood pilot program, organizers rehabbed only seven out of a planned 20 houses. **Few refugee households moved in.** This occurred for different reasons:

- Lack of direct investment from the city
- Complementary projects and \$150,000 in city-wide ECDI business start-up funds
- No funds for developers to increase work capacity or for upfront capital costs
- Only US Together has committed to placing refugees in the Dream Neighborhood
- Some pushback from local native-born residents
- National politics and federal changes constrain the refugee resettlement process—especially budgets
- Local political leaders provide rhetorical support, but they all have their own pet projects

Reasons for optimism:

- Reshuffling of positions at Metro West will open up funds to redouble efforts for the Dream Neighborhood
- Much greater community engagement since the presidential election—more donations, more volunteers
- Improved future position if Dream Neighborhood organizers can survive these “famine times”

The Dream Neighborhood is on the cusp of snowballing into a much grander success—one that has the potential to influence the way other Rust Belt cities look at revitalization and refugee resettlement.

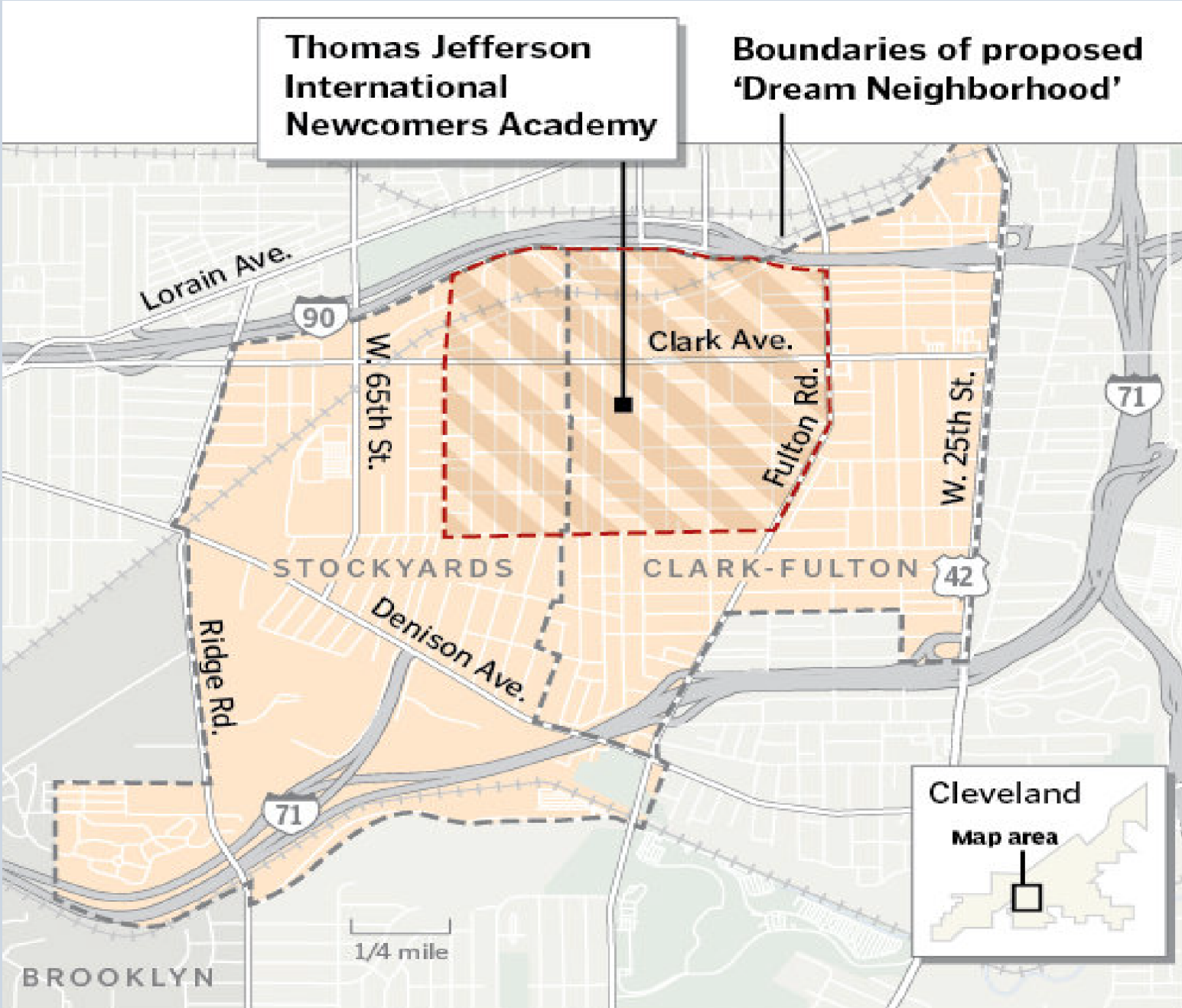


Figure 2: The Cleveland Dream Neighborhood, pop. 8,453, lies between the Stockyard and Clark-Fulton neighborhoods of the city—both of which experienced Rust Belt decline. The area population includes a disproportionate number of Latinx residents.
Source: The Cleveland Plain Dealer